

THE CLAIMS DEFINING THE INVENTION ARE AS FOLLOWS:

1. A learning system including a computer assisted simulation of a business environment having at least one virtual marketplace common to all participants in which participants can simulate the trading of processed goods and/or raw materials, each participant having access to a computing means for maintaining a record of their simulated organisation and each participant being able to communicate with other participants, the system further including:

items representing raw materials, manpower and production facilities;

means for participants to review the actions executed in operating their simulated organisation; and

communication means enabling the individual actions of each participant in operating their simulated organisations to be compared and analysed.

2. A learning system as claimed in claim 1 wherein the actions of each participant in operating their simulated organisations is communicated to an instructor as well as other participants thus enabling the participant to understand the result of their actions and decisions and how their decisions could have been modified to produce a better result.

3. A learning system as claimed in claim 1 or claim 2 wherein each participant is able to communicate physically and directly with other participants.

4. A learning system as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 3 wherein the business environment is simulated in rounds where each participant takes a turn and, at the completion of a round, the system provides to each participant a report of the result of the participants actions during the previous round.

5. A learning system as claimed in claim 4 wherein during each round the system provides each participant with one or more opportunities to make decisions, and wherein prior to the participant committing to a decision the system presents the participant with a learning message.

6. A learning system as claimed in claim 5 wherein an experienced business person or instructor assists the participants to understand the result of their decisions during the previous round and how their decisions could have been modified to produce a better result.

7. A learning system as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 6 including a stylized map of the world to enable participants to monitor the location of assets owned by their simulated organisation.

8. A learning system as claimed in claim 7 wherein physical items representing different types of assets are placed onto the stylized map of the world to represent the acquisition and location of assets owned by a simulated organisation in the world.

9. A learning system as claimed in claim 8 wherein an item is also provided to represent services.

10. A learning system as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 9 including a plurality of different sized markets with differing sets of minimum buying costs for raw materials and maximum selling prices for finished goods.

11. A learning system as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 10 including items representing land and/or external branch offices.

12. A learning system as claimed in claim 11 wherein participants may purchase the items representing land and/or external branch offices for purposes of using these assets to increase the overall value of the simulated organisation.

13. A learning system as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 12 wherein each participant's computing means is operable to display various types of information relevant to the learning system and receive instructions from the participant with respect to actions in accordance with business decisions taken by the participant.

14. A learning system as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 13 wherein each participant is able to hide assets owned by the simulated organisation from other participants.
15. A learning system as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 14 including a simulated central bank using electronic money from which each participant may obtain loans for the operation of their simulated organisations, said loans being administered by an instructor.
16. A learning system as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 15 wherein, upon completion of a round, data is exported from the participants computing means and communicated to a central computing means.
17. A learning system as claimed in claim 16 wherein the central computing means is an Internet server.
18. A learning system as claimed in claim 16 or claim 17 wherein the central computing means is operable to perform analysis of the data received from the participants' computing means, and to generate reports that may be used by an instructor and/or the participants to analyse the participants' performance in the simulation.
19. A learning system as claimed in claim 18 wherein the reports include any one or more of the following:
- a) reports on participants' performance during any past or the current fiscal term of the simulation;
 - b) reports comparing the year on year performance of a single participant;
 - c) reports comparing the participants' performance and market share during a single fiscal term;
20. A learning system as claimed in claim 18 or claim 19 wherein the reports include charts comparing selected performance factors either:
- a) between different participants during the same fiscal term;

- b) between different fiscal terms for the same participant.

21. A learning system as claimed in claim 20 wherein the performance factors that are available for selection include:

- a) accumulated earnings;
- b) average price;
- c) balance available;
- d) break even point ratio;
- e) cash reserve;
- f) equity ratio;
- g) market share;
- h) retained earnings.

22. A learning system as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 21 wherein the computing means of the participants are operable to retrieve the reports from the central computing means, and to display the reports on a display of the computing means and/or to print the reports using an associated printing means.

23. A learning system as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 22 wherein the computing means used by each participant is a Pocket PC or Personal Digital Assistant (PDA).

24. A learning system as claimed in claim 16 or claim 17 wherein the central computing means is adapted to maintain information relating to more than one simulation at any given time.

25. A learning system as claimed in claim 24 wherein the central computing means is operable by authorised users such as instructors or other facilitators, each of which is initially required to register as an operator of the central computing means in order to become authorised, and each of which is identified using a code allocated upon registration, such as a member identity number.

26. A learning system as claimed in claim 25 wherein an authorised user is able to operate the central computing means to schedule a simulation to occur at a specified time.

27. A learning system as claimed in claim 26 wherein a cost is associated with each simulation representing a price to be paid by each participant in order to participate in the simulation.

28. A learning system as claimed in claim 27 wherein the central computing means maintains a virtual account for each authorised user, the account containing points corresponding to monetary payments, and the number of points in the user's account is being checked by the central computing means upon an attempt to schedule a simulation such that if the user has insufficient points, then the simulation will not be scheduled.

29. A learning system as claimed in any one of claims 26 to 28 wherein a scheduled simulation must subsequently be activated by the authorised user before the simulation can commence, and wherein prior to activation a scheduled simulation may be cancelled, modified or activated by an authorised user.

30. A method of business learning including computer assisted simulation of a business environment having a virtual marketplace common to all participants in which participants can simulate the trading of processed goods and/or raw materials, each participant having access to a computing means where each participant maintains a record of their simulated organisation and each participant being able to communicate with other participants, the method including the steps of:

simulating the business environment in cycles where each participant takes a turn, and, at the commencement of a cycle, information relevant to the business environment is communicated to each of the participants and each participant takes individual turns to effect actions in an attempt to optimise the value of their simulated organisation for that cycle;

recording each participant's action in the computing means; and

communicating the actions of each participant with all other computing means,

such that the actions of each participant may be analysed and compared with the actions of other participants.

31. A learning method as claimed in claim 30 wherein an experienced business person or instructor assists participants to understand the result of their decisions during the previous round and how their decisions could have been modified to produce a better result.

32. A learning method as claimed in claim 30 including the step of:
selecting a market condition for each round and advising each participant of that condition that will prevail for that round.

33. A learning method as claimed in claim 30 including, during participation, the steps of:

participants purchasing raw materials from the virtual common market place;

processing those materials through a planning and design stage to produce finished goods;

processing the finished goods to a packing stage; and

placing those goods into the virtual common market for sale.

34. A learning method as claimed in claim 33 including, during participation the steps of:

purchasing processing facilities, manpower and raw materials to process and produce finished goods.

35. A learning method as claimed in claim 34 wherein finished goods sold to the market are recycled into raw materials which may be subsequently purchased.

36. A learning method as claimed in claim 30 wherein, upon the pre-determined number of cycles being completed, the data from the participants

computing means is uploaded to a central computing means operated by the instructor, said central computing means being operable to analyse the uploaded data and compare the actions of each participant in the operation of their respective simulated organisations.

37. A learning method as claimed in any one of claims 30 to 36 wherein each participant receives a comprehensive debrief from the instructor with respect to the performance of their simulated organisation.

38. A computer program product including a computer usable medium having computer readable program code and computer readable system code embodied on the medium for assisting the simulation of a business environment having a virtual marketplace common to all participants in which participants can simulate the trading of processed goods and/or raw materials, each participant having access to a computing means, each participant being able to communicate with other participants, the computer program product further including computer readable code within the computer usable medium for:

- maintaining a record of a participant's simulated organisation within the participant's computing means;

- recording the participant's actions in the participant's computing means;

and

- communicating the actions of the participant with the computing means of all other participants.

39. A computer program product as claimed in claim 38 wherein the participant's actions include:

- purchasing raw materials from the virtual common market place;

- processing those materials through a planning and design stage to produce finished goods;

- processing the finished goods to a packing stage; and

- placing those goods into the virtual common market for sale.

40. A computer program product as claimed in claim 39 wherein the participant's actions further include purchasing processing facilities, manpower and raw materials to process and produce finished goods.

41. A computer program product as claimed in any one of claims 38 to 40, the computer program product further including computer readable code within the computer usable medium for uploading data from the participant's computing means to a central computing means operated by the instructor, the central computing means being operable to analyse the uploaded data of all participants and compare the actions of each participant in the operation of their respective simulated organisations.

42. A computer program product including a computer usable medium having computer readable program code and computer readable system code embodied on the medium for assisting the simulation of a business environment having a virtual marketplace common to all participants in which participants can simulate the trading of processed goods and/or raw materials, each participant having access to a computing means, each participant being able to communicate with other participants, the computer program product further including computer readable code within the computer usable medium for:

downloading data from each participant's computing means;

analysing the downloaded data and comparing the actions of each participant in the operation of their respective simulated organisations.

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FLORA COMPUTER SERVICES

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